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Senate approves SAVE the Children

LANSING – The state Senate today approved a landmark legislative package to help prevent early learning failure and give students the skills they need to succeed both in school and in life, said Sen. Nancy Cassis, who coordinated the SAVE the Children package.

“As a state and as a society, it is important to support a robust, stable and expanding economy with a work force that can meet the challenges of our increasingly technological and knowledge-based economy,” said Cassis, R-Novi. “At this time, when education success is considered an absolute necessity for life success, this legislation will help ensure students get the best start to be successful in the classroom and in life.”

According to Cassis, the percentage of students statewide identified for special education has increased from 10.5 to 14.2 percent between the 1990-91 and 2003-04 school years. Using Northville Public Schools as a model, data shows that since implementing an early learning success program in 1992-93, the special education rate has decreased from 10.2 to 5.38 percent in 2004-05.

“The legislation focuses on our youngest learners, kindergarten through 3rd grade, and is designed to identify problems early and intervene before our children begin to struggle and have to wait for testing to qualify for costly special education services,” Cassis said. “The bills also encourage team alliances with teachers, parents and administrators, and provide valuable training for teachers to implement prevention and intervening programs.”

Senate Bill 329, sponsored by Cassis, establishes an Early Intervening Grant Program. The program will develop three model sites and up to 15 sites of improvement. Schools with a student population that exceeds the state average for learning disabled students, speech and language impaired students and emotionally impaired students are eligible for the grants.

Other legislation in the package approved today would:

- (SB 327) – Require new elementary teachers to take a three credit course in the diagnosis and remediation of reading problems in learning disabled students. This course will be a required component of the first six years/18 credits of continuing education after graduation.

- (SB 328) – Create flexibility in the use of Durant money by allowing the use of funds for research-based reading programs as well as programs that are similar to what is employed in Northville.
- (SB 330) – Allow AT-RISK funds to be used for early intervention programs.

“We know who is at risk for learning failure and we know the indications of early learning success,” Cassis said. “Early intervening programs are proven to yield results. It’s time to put what we know to work and set kids on a path to success.”

The bills now move to the House for consideration.

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